

'The Saar Statute' from Het Vrije Volk (26 October 1954)

Caption: On 26 October 1954, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Vrije Volk outlines the nature of the difficulties faced by the West German and French authorities in arriving at an agreement on the economic and political status of the Saar.

Source: Het Vrije Volk. 26.10.1954. [s.l.]. "Saarstatuut".

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The Saar Statute

In the former official residence of Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Pompadour, Prime Minister Mendès France and Federal Chancellor Adenauer have laid the foundation for a new Saar Statute. The two ladies were useful conveyors of messages — especially to His Majesty — and our two gentlemen are likewise not without diplomatic talent. They were under strong pressure to reach an agreement. Pierre Mendès France will only get his National Assembly to accept the London agreements if there is a satisfactory deal on the Saar, but he could not afford to leave the Palais Chaillot empty-handed. Adenauer had to find a happy medium between German nationalist demands and the political imperative of not letting West German sovereignty slip through his fingers, now that it was at last within reach.

Both prime ministers followed the old Dutch custom of conferring diligently with their principals. Adenauer summoned his Bundestag party leaders to Paris, Eric Ollenhauer included, and Mendès France repeatedly consulted his cabinet, as the National Assembly is in recess. It shows how important the Saar question is to domestic politics in both France and West Germany. Neither Adenauer nor Mendès France was keen to take sole responsibility for the concessions they had to make. The Federal German Chancellor has at least managed to rally his own party behind him, and the French prime minister can rely on his colleagues' support.

The Saar Statute places the mining region which straddles the Franco-German border under the authority of the Western European Union, which will be represented by a commissioner based in Saarbrücken. This official will be answerable to the council of ministers of the new Union on matters of defence and representation abroad. And the government of the Saar region will be fully autonomous. It will be elected once the Saarlanders have voted on their new Statute in a referendum. So as much has been salvaged from the van der Goes van Naters plan as was possible following the collapse of plans for the European Defence Community.

Adenauer secured an undertaking that the new Saar Statute will remain valid only until the time of a final peace settlement with Germany. This French concession went a long way towards assuring the Federal Chancellor of a majority in favour of the new Saar Statute in his parliament. Because otherwise Mendès France would not budge on his political demands, and not without reason. The German nationalists are desperate to regain the Saarland, with a generously funded campaign of *heim ins Reich* propaganda. They have drawn up an action programme, in which the 'annexed territories' in Belgium and the Netherlands also feature, and there are several extremely radical demagogues amongst their number. If the Saarlanders approve their Statute in a referendum and democratically elect a new parliament, it will be legitimate to insist that the political propagandists — German parties included — must respect the freedom which the Saarlanders have themselves chosen. Mendès France understandably proposes fierce penalties for any failure to show that respect.

Agreement on the Saar removed the last remaining obstacle to signature of the London agreements, and they have been ratified with all due speed. Consequently much of the damage done by France in years of *immobilisme* can now be made good. Especially as the latest memorandum from Moscow does not make any concessions that would justify procrastination.